

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 3, 2018
Deuteronomy 5:12-15
A Rest Worthy of Contemplation
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Did you realize today is a holiday? In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther wrote, *“The word holiday is used for the Hebrew word sabbath, which properly means ‘to rest,’ that is, to cease from labor.”* You are here to rest from your labors, and in the rest only Christ gives.

Our first lesson is the Third Commandment. Moses recorded the commandments as part of his extended historical review to Israel just prior to their entering the Promised Land. The literal part of the commandment as to a certain day does not apply to us Christians. However, God’s command as Luther explained it does. *“What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.”*

“Regard it as holy.” That makes anytime we hear and learn God’s Word a Sabbath day, a day of rest, a holy day, a holiday. Happy Holiday! It is **A Rest Worthy of Contemplation**. This contemplation requires our full attention. This contemplation requires God’s Word.

The rest we have in Christ is holy in itself. Nothing we do makes it holy. But we want to sanctify that rest, regard it as holy. We do that by occupying ourselves with holy words, works, and life. We contemplate that rest. This contemplation requires our full attention.

We do not have to choose a certain day and only that day for contemplation. Paul makes it clear to both the Romans and Colossians that for contemplating our rest in Christ, spiritual rest in the forgiveness of our sins, one day is no better than another. No one can judge us as to when and where and how we contemplate.

This is because such contemplation is not mere outward action. It is not the total cessation of all labor, or ignoring to love our neighbor in his time of need. This was true even in the Old Testament as Jesus pointed out to those who accused him of breaking the Sabbath. Our contemplation requires our full inner attention of mind and heart and soul. Not being occupied with work or others things helps. But we have that rest every time we are in the Word.

As a practical habit, we have that rest when in our freedom and time we attend the divine service. We hear and use God’s Word. We praise God, We sing. We pray. This is the time of we contemplate, as the disciples preached on Pentecost, “the wonderful works of God.” We do not observe a sabbath day by not working to avoid being put into the stocks as happened with the Puritans. We sanctify our rest in Christ among us by taking the time to give our full and undivided attention to God’s Word.

The rest worthy of contemplation is the Word of God. Our sabbath rest and the Word of God are one in the same. When Jesus invites us to come to him when we are weary and burdened, the rest he gives is the gospel that is our forgiveness and new life in him. Yes, it is good for my physical well-being to stop and hear God’s Word. It is even better for my soul’s well-being.

Why am I preaching about regarding God’s Word as sacred and gladly hearing and learning it to a room full of people and to those watching on live stream who do hold God’s Word sacred and want to hear and learn it?

Because we all have a sinful nature that does not want us to hear it. Our Old Adam whispers not so quietly in our ears, “You know this. It is the same old thing. You might as well use your time and presence in other pursuits rather than the divine service.” Satan is there always with the temptation to hear with our ears but not with our hearts. God’s Word goes in one ear and out the other. Putting it into practice is not something we really want to do.

One of the so called seven deadly or mortal sins is called acedia, which means apathy or satisfaction. It infects the believer’s heart to make us think that we know enough already. We need no more instruction, it argues. Gladly hearing and learning God’s Word either by myself or in the divine service are not necessary. Sure, you are here today and you care today, but what about tomorrow or next Sunday? Will worship become something to do for lack of something better to do?

The habit of worship is beneficial because it is the way we sanctify the rest we have in Christ that is holy in itself. If worship becomes only a habit, a thoughtless approach that considers preaching, and liturgy and singing as tedious and dull there is great danger to your soul.

What to do? Remember we are daily in the devil’s kingdom. So have God’s Word, especially the Word of Christ your Savior, in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. The Word is effective and always bears fruit. It awakens new understanding, pleasure and devotion, and pure thoughts. The words of God are not lazy or dead. They are living and active as the author of the Hebrews wrote.

In the Large Catechism, Luther played on the word, holy or sacred. In his day and even now some Christians consider relics like bones or garments of past saints as holy. Some consider certain days or festivals as holy. He wrote, “*All that stuff is a dead thing that can sanctify no one.*” Then he added, “*But God’s Word is the treasure that sanctifies everything. This is not because of the outward work but because of the Word which makes saints of us all.*”

By regarding God’s Word sacred and gladly hearing and learning it we drive away the devil. We rest under the shadow of Christ’s cross, and peer into his empty tomb with trust and appreciation. We avoid hypocrisy no matter how brilliant and instead contemplate this commandment and put it into action. Amen. <SDG>